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C O N F I D E N T I A L BEIRUT 001347

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TAGS: PREL UNSC PBTS MARR KPKO LE IS
SUBJECT: LAF AND UNSCOL DESCRIBE PREPARATIONS FOR GHAJAR
HANDOVER

REF: A. BEIRUT 1239
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Classified By: Ambassador Michele J. Sison for reasons
1.4 (b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary: Preparations for the handover of Ghajar village were very sensitive to the GOL, General Abdulruhman Shehaitly, LAF representative to the tripartite, reported, and the LAF planned to deploy a unit of four in the village, along with UNIFIL forces, after its return from Israeli control. Deputy UNSCOL Jack Christofides told us that the UN's primary goal was to get Israel to commit to a withdrawal date and an outreach plan to those living in the Lebanese side of the village, but the effort had not succeeded to date. The biggest sticking point, he said, was Israel's request that UNSCOL declare that Israel had fully complied with its UNSCR 1701 obligations after withdrawing from Ghajar, and UNIFIL was seeking a legal advisory opinion on the issue. The next round of technical discussions on Ghajar is to take place December 29. We continue to press the GOL to frame any transfer in the context of UNSCR 1701 so that it -- not Hizballah -- obtains credit for the return of occupied Lebanese territory. End summary.

LAF BALANCING PUBLIC RELATIONS AND LOGISTICS

12. (C) Preparations for the handover of Ghajar were very sensitive to the Government of Lebanon (GOL), General Abdulruhman Shehaitly, Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF) representative to the trilateral commission, told the Ambassador and visiting Special Coordinator for Regional Affairs Frederic Hof on December 17. When word of the preparations leaked to the press, LAF commander Gen. Jean Kahwagi ordered Shehaitly to stamp out the stories because "we can't bring the entire nation to negotiate," he recounted. For one, the issue of the composition of the village's population was sensitive because they are both Syrian and Israeli citizens, Shehaitly reported. Under the UN Interim Forces in Lebanon (UNIFIL) plan, the residents would be allowed to enter Israel, but not Lebanon, Shehaitly explained, and if Israeli authorities were to cross into the Lebanese portion of the village after the handover, the GOL would consider it a violation of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1701. Thus, the village residents would be responsible for maintaining all public services in the north. They would continue receiving water from the Wazzani spring on the Lebanese side, he promised, and they would be

given permission to enter Lebanon to fix the pump as per the status quo. Electricity would continue to be provided from Israel, he admitted, until "the Lebanese government can provide it."

¶3. (C) In order for the GOL to prove its sovereignty over the village, Shehaitly explained, the UNIFIL team of 12 stationed there would be accompanied by one LAF officer and three LAF soldiers. The team intends to raise the Lebanese flag over their post, but "we will not affect the residents," he said. Shehaitly complained that the Government of Israel (GOI) has done a poor job of informing the residents of the details of the UNIFIL plan, and they were convinced that a wall would separate the two halves of the village. There would be no wall, he confirmed, but UNIFIL planned to post vehicle patrols on three of the streets in the village to oversee security.

UNSCOL FLUMMOXED BY ISRAELI CONDITIONS

¶4. (C) UNIFIL was taking the lead on the Ghajar deal, Deputy UN Special Coordinator for Lebanon (UNSCOL) Jack Christofides told the Ambassador and Hof on December 17. The UN's primary goal was to get the Israelis to commit to a withdrawal date and an outreach plan to those living in the Lebanese side of the village, he explained. Thus far, he complained, Israel had "utterly failed" to explain the situation to its citizens, and the UN continued to press them to do so. Christofides confirmed that UNIFIL had asserted its readiness to move forward. UNSCOL was concerned that Israel would withdraw precipitously without properly coordinating with

UNIFIL and the LAF, he added.

¶5. (C) Should all three parties come to an agreement on how to move forward, the details would be documented in separate memorandums of understanding (MOU) between each side and UNIFIL, Christofides explained, and the facts of each MOU would differ slightly answer each party's political needs. The biggest sticking point to date was Israel's request that UNSCOL declare that it had fully complied with its UNSCR 1701 obligations after withdrawing from Ghajar. Although Shebaa Farms were beyond the Blue Line and not a factor in this context, he said, the buoy line in the sea that Israel unilaterally established was a complicating issue, as was the continued Israeli overflights of Lebanese territory. UNSCOL polloff Rami Shehadeh reported that UNIFIL had already submitted the question to the UN office of legal affairs for an advisory opinion.

NO PROGRESS IN UNIFIL-GOI CONSULTATION

¶6. (C) General Graziano's December 21 meeting in Jerusalem with Israeli MFA DG Yossi Gal yielded nothing more than "a reiteration of Israeli interest" to conduct a handover, but only after "social issues" were resolved with the village's residents, UNIFIL poloff Francesco Manca told us. Manca, who accompanied Graziano to the meeting, stressed that the tone of the meeting was positive. UNIFIL wanted to complete the handover before Gen. Graziano's departure, said Manca. UNIFIL's motivation for the timing, he noted, was that implementing UNIFIL's plan during the transition between commanders would be operationally difficult. For his part, UNSCOL's Christofides characterized the GOI approach to "biding time" in a December 21 conversation. Christofides also confirmed that the next round of mid-level technical discussions between UNIFIL and the GOI would occur December ¶29.

¶7. (C) Comment: Although our Lebanese interlocutors are eager to regain Ghajar, repeated delays on the Israeli side and its failure to properly inform its citizens on the details of the UNIFIL plan have led to a measure of cynicism. We continue to press our GOL interlocutors to frame the transfer, if and when it should happen, in the context of UNSCR 1701 so that the GOL -- not Hizballah -- obtains credit for the return of

occupied Lebanese territory.
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